Petrie, Duncan, ed,* New Questions of British Cinema, *British Film Institute, London, 1992. ISBN 0 85170 322 4. vi + 119pp. Distributed by Indiana University Press.

You do these reviews to get free books, but every now and then something happens that you didn't count on. Since I'm drawn to the past almost everywhere, I don't have a lot of interest in contemporary British cinema but a week ago *MIA* sent me a copy of this sort of *British Cinema Now NOW* to review. Should I do it?

Consider the chapter headings: 'The Issue of National Cinema and British Film Producers'; 'Subsidies, Audiences, Producers'; 'Seven Deadly Myths: Film Policy and the BFI, a Personal Lexicon'; 'Changing Conditions of Independent Production in the UK'; 'Low-Budget British Production: A Producer's Account'; 'Production Strategies in the UK'; 'Independent Disitribution in the UK: Problems and Proposals'; 'Marketing Issues in the Film Industry Today'; 'Researching the Market for British Films'. And the writer's list contains a few names I think I know: Colin McCabe, Julian Petley, Geoffrey (The Cheque Is Probably Not In The Mail) Nowell-Smith.

Definitely too good to pass on to someone more qualified. I can tell before the first page that this is a Really Useful Book: all anyone seriously has to know about the Pom's film industry circa 1992. More than that, it furnishes an exemplary outline for other surveys of the State of a Nation's Film Business: it is a yardstick with which one may be able to flog others. There are no textual analyses here, but there are a lot of facts and figures.

And virtually every line invites speculations about similar areas in Australia. For example: 'the contempt for television and the emphasis on the auteur are the two dominant problems for European cinema and ... they amount to the same thing: a determination to ignore audiences' (p27); 'the fate of *British* production is closely linked to the state of *independent* distribution and, to a lesser extent, exhibition' (p76); 'it is quite possible to conceive of a national cinema which is *nationally specific* without being either nationalist or attached to homegenising myths of national identity' (p16).

This is not just a book worth getting free. It is one worth buying.

— William D Routt

Petrie, Duncan, ed,* Cinema and the Realms of Enchantment: Lectures, Seminars and Essays by Marina Warner and Others, *British Film Institute, 1993. ISBN 0 85170 405 0. pb, 144pp. Distributed by Indiana University Press.

This stimulating collection of essays exploring how the fairy tale has influenced the cinema is part of the BFI working papers series. It includes three essays by Marina Warner, *The Uses of Enchantment, Through a Childs' Eyes* and *Women Against Women in the Old Wives' Tale* in which she discusses the close relationship between cinema and fantasy, the presence of children as mediating consciousness in film, the theme of transformation and the issue of misogyny. Each essay develops one particular theme in relation to a wide range of films, including classical tides by Renoir, Vigo and Cocteau as well as more contemporary films. Her analysis of the different screen adaptations of Cinderella, for instance, provides interesting comment on changing social mores. Warner's selection and juxtaposition of titles is often as illuminating as her symbolic reading of these. The other essays apply some of Warner's key issues to specific films, such as the theme of transformation in *The Cat People*, its sequel, *The Curse of the Cat People*, and *Batman Returns*. This inspiring book opens up new perspectives for the analysis of film and television and is well worth reading.

— Kari Hanet

Richardson, Michael,* Georges Bataille, *Routledge, London, 1994. ISBN 0 415 09842 4.

Land, Nick,* The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism, *Routledge, London, 1992. ISBN 0 415 05608 X. Distributed by the Law Book Company.

If the academy can recuperate Georges Bataille and make him respectable, then anything is possible. His writings from the 1920s to the 1950s defy genre, classification and very often taste. Which is exactly what makes them such a seductive object for more restrained and proper scholars.

Bataille is something of a missing link between the late romantic aspect of the surrealist movement and so-called poststructuralism. As I've argued before, a more sensible genealogy would categorise Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard as postsurrealist. Each certainly owes a lot to

Bataille, including the latter's intense fascination and hostility towards Hegel. A great many misunderstandings about Hegel find their way into contemporary thinking via poststructuralist (mis)readings of Bataille on Kojeve on Hegel.

The reason this matters is that Hegel's phenomenology of recognition is perhaps the first philosophy of communication that treats communication as a problem rather than a given that is premised on a dialectic with the other, and hence does not lapse into solipsism. Phenomenologies of perception and recognition have been out of vogue during the long(ish) reign of semiotics and screen theory, but with screen based media being edged out by interactive video games and the like, we may have need to investigate these problems afresh.

Richardson, who has also edited a collection of Bataille's surrealist era writings for Verso, offers a conventional and conventionalising account of Bataille. It runs the risk of making him just a little too acceptable, but he's a better introduction to Bataille than Denis Hollier's whimsical book *Against Architecture*. A good companion to Richardson is Nick Land's extraordinary *Thirst for Annihilation*. Land tries to do justice to the radical heterogeneity of Bataille's texts and the truly transgressive form of his thinking. He puts him in the company of the pessimists, principally Freud and, in an inspired move, Schopenhauer.

— McKenzie Wark

Lane, Richard*, The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama, 1923-1960, *Melbourne University Press, 1994. ISBN 0 552 84556 8, xx + 397pp, $49.95 bb.

It is common nowadays to hear the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s referred to as 'The Golden Years' of radio. These were the years when, for most Australians, radio was a primary source of entertainment, but it is fair to say that it is mostly memories of radio plays and serials which excite this nostalgia. The public's appetite, especially for serials, was seemingly insatiable. It is no exaggeration to say that from the mid 1930s the perceived need to mass produce and distribute serials nationwide was one of the strongest forces driving the development of the organisational structures and technical innovations of commercial broadcasting. However, it should be remembered that 'Golden Age' is a term commonly signifying nostalgia for a vanished era, rarely recognised as such when it is flourishing. Thus it is a sad fact that little attention was paid then to making a systematic record of the production of radio drama. Now when there is a revived interest in our broadcasting history, we find that much of the documentation has been lost. Fortunately, a great reservoir of information still exists in the memories of those who worked in the industry, and in their scrapbooks and personal papers. Richard Lane was one of those whose working life extended from the great days of radio drama well into television, and for whom so many of the major figures of those days were friends and colleagues. Few, therefore, could have been better placed to compile these significant biographies.

The wealth of detail and telling anecdotal material would have made Lane's collection an important work if for no other reason than that they preserved information rapidly disappearing. However, the biographies, as Lane has said, were orginally commissioned for a projected encyclopaedia of Australian music, radio and recorded sound, and when that did not eventuate he was able to explore a concept of 'history through biography'. *The Golden Age* is not a history in the conventional sense of a strictly chronological sequence of events, with an analysis of causes and effects. Some sense of chronology is achieved by the division into two parts: 1923-1940, when the technology and institutions of broadcasting and the techniques of radio drama were being developed; and 1940-60, the time of flourishing and eventual decline. Further subdivisions are prefaced by fairly brief explanations of matters Lane perceived to be significant to the period. The comparative looseness of this arrangement has made it possible for Lane to reorganise the biographies more or less according to the time of the subjects' mature work; this grouping facilitated the accumulation of detail of working lives and anecdotal material from which a reader (with some assiduity) could build up a picture of successive periods, and acquire some sense of the issues affecting the lives and careers of the people involved.

Lane's book is all the more timely, however, because it appears in the midst of